

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SINGAP 02593 120726Z
ACTION HA-05

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0452

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION GENEVA

CONFIDENTIAL SINGAPORE 2593

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: SINGAPORE TRANSIT CENTER

REF: GENEVA 8794

1. WE WARMLY ENDORSE GENEVA'S REFTEL SUGGESTION THAT ABOUT 500 NUMBERS BE ALLOTTED TO UNHCR FOR SINGAPORE REFUGEES IN ORDER TO GET TRANSIT CENTER PROJECT OFF DEAD CENTER, CONDITIONAL UPON ADDITIONAL NUMBERS BEING PROVIDED BY OTHER COUNTRIES.

2. AS WE HAVE BEEN REPORTING, THERE IS NO REAL CHANCE OF MOVEMENT ON THIS PROJECT UNLESS UNHCR TAKES THE INITIATIVE. WE CAN APPRECIATE UNHCR WISH THAT SINGAPOREANS RESPOND TO MACE'S DECEMBER 1977 LETTER BUT THERE IS NO PROSPECT OF GOS DOING THIS. SINGAPOREANS APPARENTLY FEEL THEY HAVE ALREADY RESPONDED TO LETTER MANY TIMES OVER IN

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VARIOUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND OTHER COMMENTS SPELLING OUT IN DETAIL THEIR NEEDS RE ADVANCE QUARANTEES. WHEN WE LAST SUGGESTED TO SINGAPOREANS THAT THEY START BALL ROLLING BY REPLYING TO MACE LETTER, THEY WERE SURPRISED AND OBVIOUSLY NOT FAVORABLY INCLINED. THERE APPEAR TO BE SOME MISCONCEPTIONS HERE: UNHCR IN GENEVA SEEMS TO FEEL THAT IT HAS MADE FIRM PROPOSAL TO GOS AND THAT PROPRIETY REQUIRES GOS RESPONSE. SINGAPOREANS,

ON OTHER HAND, SEE UNHCR "PROPOSAL" AS NOTHING MORE THAN FEW TENTATIVE COMMENTS BY SAMPATKUMAR IN LATE 1977, A RATHER PER-FUNCTORY LETTER FROM MACE, AND THEN SIX MONTHS OF SILENCE BROKEN ONLY BY PERIODIC US (NOT UNHCR) EXPRESSIONS OF CONTINUED INTEREST. SOMETHING OBVIOUSLY IS NEEDED TO BREAK OUT THIS PRO-POSAL, AND USMISSION GENEVA SUGGESTION MIGHT WELL FILL THE BILL.

3. AS SUGGESTED REFTEL, CONCERN OVER ALLOCATING NUMBERS FOR SINGAPORE COULD BE ALLEVIATED BY LIMITING THEM TO REFUGEES ARRIVING ON MERCHANT VESSELS. PRACTICAL EFFECT WOULD BE SAME WITH OR WITHOUT THIS LIMITATION. SINGAPOREANS REMAIN ACCUTELY AWARE THAT THEY ARE WORLD'S MOST DENSELY POPULATED COUNTRY AND WE SEE NO PROSPECT THAT THEY CAN BE INDUCED TO ADMIT REFUGEES ARRIVING IN SMALL BOATS, ESPECIALLY WITH MALAYSIAN BEACHES ONLY A FEW MILES AWAY.

4. EVEN THOUGH IMPROMPTU REFUGEE TRANSIT FACILITY IS ALREADY OPERATING HERE SUPPORTED BY ONE-AT-A-TIME ADVANCE GUARANTEES FROM USG AND OTHER COUNTRIES, WE BELIEVE ESTABLISHMENT OF PROPOSED TRANSIT CENTER WOULD BE DECIDED ADVANTAGE. UNHCR IS FACING GROWING DIFFICULTIES IN HOUSING THE 400-PLUS REFUGEES NOW IN SINGAPORE PLUS NEW ARRIVALS, WHILE GOS IS BEGINNING TO SHOW SIGNS OF NERVOUSNESS AT EVER-INCREASING INFLOW. IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LARGER NUMBER OF REFUGEES, PROPOSED TRANSIT CAMP WOULD EXTEND TIME AVAILABLE

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FOR PROCESSING THEM; WE NOW HAVE MAXIMUM OF THREE MONTHS, WHILE PRIME MINISTER LEE HAS SAID THAT DEADLINE FOR MOVING REFUGEES IN PROPOSED CAMP COULD BE AS MUCH AS 9-12 MONTHS.

5. WE ARE ASSUMING THAT PROPOSED 500-NUMBER ALLOCATION WOULD NOT BE A ONE-SHOT ALLOCATION BUT AN INITIAL ALLOCATION ONLY, TO BE REPLENISHED REGULARLY IN ORDER KEEP CAMP POPULATION AT THAT FIGURE, AND THAT SAME WOULD BE TRUE OF NUMBERS ALLOCATED BY OTHER COUNTRIES. COST OF UNHCR OF SETTING UP CAMP WOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED OTHERWISE.

6. RE SUGGESTION IN LAST SENTENCE PARA ONE REFTEL THAT UNHCR MIGHT "PUBLICLY URGE GOS TOWARDS A MORE HUMANITARIAN STANCE," WE EMPHATICALLY URGE THAT THIS NOT BE DONE. SINGAPOREANS FEEL THAT, CONSIDERING THEIR UNIQUE LAND/POPULATION SITUATION, THEY HAVE DONE REASONABLY WELL BY REFUGEES IN PERMITTING HUNDREDS TO TRANSIT SINGAPORE. APART FROM MALAYSIA, THAILAND AND HANDFUL OF WESTERN COUNTRIES, THEY NOT AWARE THAT OTHER NATIONS OF WORLD HAVE BEEN EVEN THIS FORTH-COMING. PUBLIC SCOLDING FROM UNHCR--OR ANY IMPLIED CRITICISM ON PART UNHCR-- WILL NOT BE HELPFUL TO REFUGEES BUT COULD HAVE OPPOSITE EFFECT.

INGRAHAM

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Message Attributes

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